

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

All THE YEAR ROUND

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A NARROW ESCAPE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DENIS DODGE," "NO ALTERNATIVE,"
&c. &c.

CHAPTER I.—THE SERPENT AND THE DOVE.

"WOMEN—especially if they're love-sick to the idiotic degree that Miss Constable is, will forgive almost anything; but you're trying her hard, Frank; even I, prejudiced as I am in your favour, must admit that."

The speaker is a good-looking girl of two or three and twenty, richly endowed by nature with the gift of seeming to be whatever is most fascinating to the person whom it is her current desire to please. Richly endowed too by nature with a beautiful figure, and a face capable of expressing any emotion which she may be desirous of portraying. It expresses light, half-amused contempt now; nothing more. But in reality she is keenly anxious as to what will be the effect of her apparent burst of frankness on her cousin—the man by her side.

"May is a dear little thing," he says, slowly, "but it does become a bore when a fellow has to go to the same house night after night, and hear the same things said, and ——"

"See exactly the same expression on the face of your beloved," the girl interrupts quickly. "Yes, that will be trying enough to you, you fickle fellow, when you're married, and must endure it; but then the mere fact of your being compelled to endure it will enable you to do it."

"We won't begin to talk about my marriage yet," he answers, with a slight air of confusion, and, as he speaks, he releases his cousin Kate's hand, which he has been holding during the brief colloquy.

He feels that there is something like incongruity between this attitude towards Kate, and the mention of his marriage with another girl.

The young lady feels it too. For all the cousinship between them, for all her greed of admiration, for all her daring disregard of the absent May's claim upon Frank as a rule, Kate is ashamed of herself now.

"I suppose I forgot that you're only my cousin, not my brother; forgive me, Frank, for mentioning the matter in that way."

In an instant she is sisterly in a sweet insincere way, that is a good bit of acting, and appeals powerfully to Frank Forest's love of anything dramatic.

"You may mention any matter, in any way that seems good to you, Kate," he says, warmly, when his sisters come into the room, and Kate saunters to meet them, with as unembarrassed an air as if she had been engrossed with the newspaper she holds in her hand, instead of with another woman's lover.

"Mamma is not coming down to breakfast," one of the girls announces, and the other one asks—

"What do they say of 'Duplicity,' Frank?"

"They say, at least the Scourge says, that Frank is quite the coming dramatist," Kate replies for him, "don't you both feel very proud of him? I do."

She does unmistakably as she turns her lustrous grey hazel eyes full on his, and smiles the flashing happy smile that a girl can smile upon the man she loves, or upon the man whom she wishes to make believe she loves.

"He's not at all bad, as brothers go," Gertrude, the elder sister, says, "but if

the Scourge takes to over-rating him as much as you do Kate, he will lose his head, and become a bore to his sisters, who can't be expected to pour out paragraphs of adulation, whenever his lines happen to be so well given that he is accredited with having written them well."

"However, we will go again to-night, and mark May's ecstasies," Marian the younger sister adds, patronisingly. "Poor May! if she is always going to be panic-stricken, whenever you bring out a play, Frank, what good will her life be to her?"

The two Miss Forests are good-looking girls, but they pale before the brighter light of their far more attractive cousin, Kate Mervyn.

Buckles fasten nothing on their shoulders, and weapons of war are thrust through their hair and their sashes in the most approved fashion. Chains of steel suspend all manner of useless articles from their respective waists. They are girt about with ferociously appointed belts of Russian leather, and sounding brass. Wherever custom decrees that they may be puffed, they are puffed to the best of the ability of rich silks and buckram. They have about them the swing of a life of perpetual small excitements, and they tread the social wheel with the grace of those who feel they decorate their portion of it. Nevertheless, with all these natural and acquired attributes of theirs, Kate puts them out effectually.

Kate, who in her dress affects the matchless lines of the riding-habit, who banishes bows that tie nothing, and buckles that buckle nothing, and straps that sustain nothing, from every portion of her toilette, leads the eye off her dashing cousins at once. Even they cannot help feeling a goodly portion of what they had come to believe to be necessary, superfluous, when she, in that studied simplicity of hers, comes between them and throws out their grotesque outlines. They watch her now, as she walks about the room, the while she reads aloud selected passages of praise of the comedy which was produced last night.

When Miss Mervyn has exhausted the published panegyrics on the piece, she sits down to breakfast and utters a few original ones, until she is interrupted by Gertrude, who has heard quite enough to satisfy her sisterly heart of her brother's play.

"Are you going to the Constables to luncheon with us, Frank?"

"I am going up to the theatre."

"Oh dear! then it will fall to our unhappy fate to have to tell May what she calls 'all about it;'" Kate! yours shall be the pleasing task of assuaging her maid-enly fears as to her lover's success."

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense," Frank breaks in angrily; "You're only making Kate think May a greater fool than she thinks her already; you have the knack, Gertrude, of making everybody absurd by the way you speak of them."

"Don't be cross because I imply that May has more of the softness of the dove than the wisdom of the serpent," his sister laughs carelessly, and Kate, who is always on the watch to see the slightest change in the position of that weathercock, man's fancy, puts in—

"Softness is far preferable to wisdom in a wife, I should imagine; fancy breakfasting and dining and going through the daily round with a wise woman. I must go up to aunt Marian now, and read these notices to her," she says, collecting the papers. Then, as she is about leaving the room, she turns and fires a parting shot.

"When I think of what aunt Marian will feel, I can't help feeling that I wish I were your mother, Frank."

She is five or six years younger than her cousin Frank, therefore the expression of the wish is not calculated to raise distressing suspicions of her age in his mind. Man as he is, successful dramatist as he is, he is by no means unwilling to accept these private tributes of sugared laurel leaves from the hands of his cousin Kate. Accordingly he is quick to resent the half mocking tone and laugh with which his eldest sister says—

"I should think Kate has had some practice in the art of praising men, shouldn't you, Marian? I wonder if she would play the part of consoler equally well if you had failed, Frank."

"She would play it better than you would," he retorts quickly, "for she is capable of appreciating what's good in itself, whether it fails or not. What makes you go to the Constables to-day?"

"Their fond desire to heap honours on the head of this fresh member of the family. Mrs. Constable and May are both ready to adore Kate, and you know when Mrs. Constable is ready to adore man, woman, or child, she always offers him, she, or it something to eat; and May is always delighted to get a new legitimate listener to her praises of you."

"Don't chaff any more about May," he says, rising up and walking to the window, "and don't trot her out for Kate's amusement," he adds abruptly, as his conscience pricks him at the thought of the desolation which will pervade May's spirit when she finds that he is not of the party. "Tell May how busy I am, haven't a moment to myself, and all that sort of thing, will you?"

"Yes, of course I will; and look here, Frank, I won't say a word about the neat and obliging way in which Kate has copied out those parts for you, and those delightful long strolls in Kensington Gardens in the afternoons. I'll be as discreet as—as Kate herself."

"Do you mean to go with the Constables to-night, Frank, or with us," the other sister asks, and he mutters something about "hardly knowing, but thinking it better that the Constables should act independently, as something unforeseen might of course arise to detain him."

"Of course we can't all pack into one box; there will be Kate and you and me in our box; do let the Constables be somewhere else, Frank."

"Oh, Marian, Frank must be with May," Gertrude says. She is not going herself, and is indifferent to the prospect of other people being slightly crushed. With this the three separate—the girls to put on their habits for the morning ride; the brother to go up to the theatre to do away with two or three little crumples in the new piece.

His sisters start off presently, and still he loiters about in the library, whistling softly, and being restless and uncertain altogether. Before he can make up his mind to quit the house Kate comes in with a look that is new to him on her expressive face.

"Is there anything the matter? what is it?" he asks, going to meet her with outstretched hands, and she puts hers into his confidently, and answers—

"Frank, aunt Marian, out of the dearest kindness to me, has made me so unhappy."

"That's the form women's kindness very often takes, but my mother is different to most women; what has vexed you, Kate?"

He lifts one hand up as he speaks and is going to kiss it, but Kate stops him.

"No, don't do it; it's just that that is the matter. I ought not to tell you, but I've no one else to turn to, and I must tell you. Frank, she has accused me of being forgetful of May, and May's claims upon you."

"I wish my mother would let my affairs alone," he says in a tone of vexation; "forgetful of May! Why should you not be forgetful of May? What claim has she upon your recollection? If I forget her now——"

He pauses and his hearer's face falls, and she says gently—

"If you forget her! You can't do it, Frank."

"I should be a scoundrel if I did," he replies quickly; "but what does my mother mean? why has she been worrying you?"

"She means that I have shown too much interest in you, Frank," she says with an effort that sends the blood from her heart to her brow, and her voice fails her, and she stands before him with bent head and trembling hands, for she is not acting now.

The flattery is very potent, but he does struggle hard with inclination and temptation. He recalls all May's innocent trustfulness, he tries to think of her pure deep love. But all the while he is longing to break through all bonds, and to draw this girl to him with kisses warmer than any he has ever given May Constable.

"I wish she had not opened the question," he says angrily, "at any rate we will put it to rest; it shall not disturb you if I can help it. If you are to be spoken about and misunderstood because of your kindness to me, why I should be a selfish fellow if I tried to get you to show it; I will not be selfish in my pursuit of you, Kate; forgive me for what is past and accept my promise there shall be no more of it."

She looks up at him amazed, heartsore, and stricken. She had not anticipated that he would take her disclosure thus. Then he, overpowered by the look which is so full of the interest which she has been accused of feeling, and by way, also, of rewarding himself for the excellent resolutions he has just made, lowers his head at last, and lets his lips rest on her forehead.

"We are cousins, you know," he mutters, excusingly; and Kate answers—

"Surely in that fact there is to be found sufficient reason why you shouldn't shun me for the future, Frank? May has your confidence, your vows, your promise, and she will have your name; let me have your friendship."

She will not say, "May has your love;" and he notices the omission, and is partly pleased and partly pained by it. He is, at the same time, glad and sorry that the

firtation of the last three weeks should have developed into a deeper feeling on her side; and he is a little annoyed that the cool quality of his regard for May should be so transparent to his cousin. Still, he allows himself to be hurried on by his ardent nature to say, in response to her request—

“ You’ll always have my warmest friendship, Kate, however little I may be able to show it ; and as for the rest—if I had only been free ! ”

“ If I had been a man, would I have let my fetters stand in my way ? ” she thinks, in contemptuous anger. Then the bitter sensation assails her that, after all, she may be in the position of the biter bit. In this case, though she began in sport, she has developed into earnestness ; and Frank can calmly speak about what he would have done, “ if ” he had been free ! Worse than all, the conviction smites her that she has let him perceive that he has gained an easy victory over her, and that, therefore, she will be at the disadvantage which invariably attends the one who loves most. Happily for them both, these humiliating considerations conspire to make her release her hands from his, and move away from him. She is in the act of doing this ; she is only just in safety, when a round-eyed, fair-haired, gentle-faced girl comes in with the air of one who is quite at home, and has a right of possession.

“ I have come to tell you that I won’t have you waste any more time about those tiresome plays, Frank,” May Constable begins, in her effusive, soft way. “ I met the girls, and they told me you were going up to the theatre ; and, I believe, instead of that, you have been at home, writing. Now, hasn’t he, Miss Mervyn ? and isn’t it a shame that he should work so hard, and never give himself one pleasure ? ”

She is by his side as she speaks her loving platitudes, clinging to his arm, and conducting herself as a girl may conduct herself who is openly and honestly engaged in the eyes of all the world. Frank is crimsoning with shame ; not at his half-falseness to May, but that Kate should be compelled to witness what strikes him at this particular moment as May’s foolish fondness. As for Kate, she is gnawed by the pangs of jealous wrath, and, novel as are the sensations, and great as is the charm novelty has for erring humanity, she does not like them.

“ You are quite right,” she says, in the clear, distinct tones, which offer such a marked contrast to May’s lisping, slightly-affected pronunciation. “ You are quite right, Miss Constable. Frank has been doing very hard and very unpleasant work this morning ; if I were in your place, I should see that he was more careful of himself in future.”

“ Oh Frank ! ” May ejaculates, her inconsequent mind in a state of chaos as Kate’s words conjure up all sorts of possibilities and impossibilities ; “ you hear your cousin calls it hard, unpleasant work ! Why will you go on ? I know so much writing is bad for the health ; I get a headache, if I only write a letter. It’s thinking so much, I suppose ; one has to think so much when one’s writing a letter. I do wish you would be satisfied with your office work : and you don’t want the money.”

“ You are ambitious for him, indeed,” Kate says, with cool satire that glances off May’s intelligence, as shot does off an iron-clad. Frank says, hurriedly, “ Don’t be foolish, May,” and gets himself away at last, leaving the serpent and the dove alone together.

CHAPTER II. THE “ DEAR LITTLE THING ” AT HOME.

MAY CONSTABLE is a friendship-at-any-price girl. She has always a bosom friend on hand, about whom she entwines herself, and in whose ear she reposes perfectly innocent and uninteresting confidences. Frank’s sisters have not exactly repulsed, but they have certainly never invited these ebullitions of feeling, consequently May thinks them hard. Having imprudently dropped a well-beloved schoolfellow who had been as the oak to the ivy to her, previous to her engagement to Frank Forest, she has been on the qui vive for the last few months to discover some trusty piece of lattice work about which she may twine her tendrils. It says much for her subtle and delicate insight into character and motives that she should have already mentally appointed Kate to the office of her feminine guide, philosopher, and friend.

Aggrieved as Kate is, disappointed in her own strength, outraged by a full sense of her own weakness, humiliated by the knowledge of the truth that Frank has himself driven home to her, namely that he has not lost his head entirely, though she has entirely lost her heart, she has still a rem-

nant of honour left with regard to her relations with this girl to whom Frank Forest belongs. She shrinks from May's caresses. She gives a decided negative to May's proposition that they "shall go together to her mother's house, and sit in her own dear little room, and have a nice comfortable talk" before the Misses Forest come home to join them. She portrays no manner of interest in May in fact, but the bride-elect displays no consciousness of being chilled or hurt.

There is a great display of affection between Frank's mother and Frank's future wife presently, when the former comes down in a graceful morning wrapper, a good deal of motherly pride and of aunty displeasure. Mrs. Forest loves her son as a clever reflection of herself, and she likes safe girls with money. Now May is essentially a safe girl, and her money is an even better established fact than her discretion.

She is a slight, tall, admirably arranged woman, this mother of the Forests. One of those women whom the combination of carefully selected phraseology, elegant dresses, and goodly stature, unite in elevating into an atmosphere of something that almost approaches dignity. A woman who has known riches and honour in her day, and who has had her experience of the black side of life also, in the shape of poverty, the falling away of friends, and a general inability to keep the wolf from the door. It must be credited to her powers of management under these latter circumstances, that she always secured to herself such an amount of personal comfort and freedom from the lower forms of self-abnegation as tended materially to preserve the good effects of her originally graceful figure, and unruffled mien, manners, and face.

What marvel that such a woman, she being not entirely selfish be it understood, should shrink, now that the sun is shining upon her again, from any alliance for her children that might cast them into the bleak shade of poverty? Her own riches had all taken wing once upon a time, and her husband, a stock-broker, had toiled and wearied and dragged on a generally miserable existence after that episode, until he achieved a competence for her and her children. Having fulfilled his destiny by realising this noble aim he died, or as she expresses it to this day—"He was mercifully removed before he had the opportunity of risking all that stood between me and despair."

As far as the disposition of the money is concerned, she is the sole arbiter of her children's fates and fortunes, for it is settled unreservedly upon her. But she has never been an unwise woman in this matter. She has been liberal to her children. She has made her son feel that he is the master of the house in which they all dwell. In all that concerns himself alone she has made Frank feel that he is free as air. But when it came to the matter of his marriage some short time since, she told him that "This was a matter that concerned his family, and that it behoved him to clearly ascertain what Miss Constable's prospects were before he committed himself to formally proposing to her."

"Understand this, Frank," she had said, "if you marry a girl with money, you will have your rightful share of the poor equivalent your father made me for what he lost for me; but if you marry into poverty, it will very justly go to your sisters, for they will never be able to look for help from you."

"And supposing they choose to marry poor men?" he had suggested.

"In that case they will be very uncomfortable, for I should certainly never encourage such folly by making them any allowance during my life."

The result of this confidential converse with his mother was to hurry Frank on very perceptibly in his love-making to May Constable. The cold, frigid opposition to any other element than wealth in the affair stung all that was generous within him, and he had pledged himself and his honour pretty deeply to the girl, before he found out that she amply fulfilled the one condition his mother had named as the essential.

This condition being fairly ascertained now, Mrs. Forest has little pity on, and no patience with that undefinable something which her quick eyes see is growing up between her beautiful niece and her handsome, clever son.

"If my brother had only been honest enough to tell me what a witch his Kate is, I would never have been weak enough to put her in Frank's path. Having committed that error, I can only repair it by putting her out of his path as quickly as possible."

This thought has been her constant companion, day and night, for the last week; but she has been unable to break the chain of habitual intercourse which

has easily and naturally formed itself between the young people. This morning, however, there has been something a little too tender and true in Kate's pride in her cousin's success. Therefore his mother has spoken—with what effect has been seen.

There is a good deal of barely-suppressed scorn in Kate's face, as she looks on in silence while Frank's mother and Frank's bride-elect embrace and congratulate each other about "Duplicity."

"You must go and be very proud of him to-night, May," Mrs. Forest says; and May says she is not sure about going, if he will stay home with her instead.

"He must have had enough of those horrid theatres, poor boy; so I shall make him stay with me to-night," she says, with an air of having authority over him, which goads Kate into saying—

"Your suggestion will be most flattering to him—on the second night of his piece."

"Ah! but I don't mean to flatter him too much," May says, with unfeigned earnestness; for she is not exactly keen of comprehension, and she is extremely desirous that Kate should understand that, as an engaged young lady, she is in the position of the flattered, not the flatterer. To say that Mrs. Forest feels indignant with her niece for being cleverer than May Constable would be unjust, perhaps. But, certain it is that she feels mortified and angry, and the anger vents itself on Kate.

"There is something more flattering to a man, my dear, in the fact of the girl he loves desiring his society, than in her wishing to go and see his play even: the author is dearer to her than his work."

"That's just what Miss Mervyn meant," self-satisfied May says, bringing all the power of her weakness to bear on the explanation—"but Frank bears spoiling well; we will spoil him all our lives, won't we, Mrs. Forest?"

"Frank is more likely to spoil you, darling," Mrs. Forest says. But there is no genuine ring about her tones; and Kate has the comfort of feeling that, in order to keep things straight, the mother has to do a good deal of the love-making for the son.

For some reason, or other, Mrs. Forest takes an early opportunity of turning the conversation away from the dramatic interest of the present, and causing it to run in the domestic channel of the future.

"I have been telling my niece Kate,"

she says, "that, when she pays us the next visit, she will find it much pleasanter; you will be able to chaperone her then."

"You have never worded the affectionate forethought to me, Aunt Marian," Kate says, suavely; and then she goes on to turn the tables on her perhaps unconscious tormentor, by speaking of the trial that is laid upon every woman during the first year of her married life—the dread, namely, that she may bore her husband out of even the semblance of affection for her.

"No woman with a properly-regulated mind need have that dread," Mrs. Forest puts in, hurriedly. "This dear girl, for example, even now, though she can't give him the full sympathy which she will give when she is his wife—it's beautiful to see how he turns to her from all the excitement and intoxication of worldly flattery and success. It's beautiful to me, very beautiful."

"So it is to me very beautiful," Kate says, quietly; and May beamingly avows that she never felt afraid of boring anyone in her life, and that Frank likes being quiet: he often doesn't speak a dozen words to her of an evening.

"But he likes to hear mamma and me talk," she adds; "and we chatter on about—oh, about anything, you know, just as if he wasn't there."

The two Miss Forests come in happily at this juncture; happily for Mrs. Forest and Kate, that is, but with no special air of happiness about themselves.

"There was no one out to-day, positively no one," Miss Forest says in answer to some inquiries as to whom she has seen; and then she adds, as if he were altogether outside the pale of anybody's interest, "We had a bow from Mr. Graham, mamma, and when we came away Marian was weak enough to let him come up and tell her that he would call here to-morrow."

"I shall not be at home to him," Mrs. Forest says, decisively. Then she goes on to explain to the all-important May Constable, that she really cannot receive a man at her house who has "been dismissed the service." May says "of course not," with equal decision, although she has not the faintest notion as to the amount of ignominy that is the righteous due of such an offender.

"Clement Graham has effrontery enough for anything," Gertrude Forest puts in complainingly, and she is rather surprised

when her cousin Kate comes to her and says—

"I do admire your thoroughness in tracking down misfortune, Gertrude; what is his unpardonable sin?"

"He was such a nice young fellow," Marian says, in a superfluous way that is infinitely disagreeable to her mother and sister. "And he used to be here with Frank a great deal—it was he introduced Frank to you, May, you ought to stand by him—and he was getting on so well in the Navy, and he was turned out because he wouldn't tamely submit to being badgered by a superior officer; that's the whole truth, mamma: I may not have put it prettily, but that is the truth."

"I like the way you have put it," Kate says, coming forward, with a quiet determination to be heard that ensures her an audience; "we are all so lenient to the wrongdoer who escapes unpunished, and so virtuously severe on the one who is found out; Marian is in a minority, I know, but I'm with her entirely in such a matter as this."

"My dear Kate, I knew you had a good many girlish follies clinging about you still, though you have attained years of discretion; but I thought you had passed out of the stage of effusive enthusiasm about a cause of which you know nothing," Mrs. Forest says, and she pats May Constable's hand as she speaks, and looks for a smile of sympathy on that young lady's face; of sympathy with the half contemptuous tolerance she is expressing for her niece.

"I hope the folly of believing that the sin is not one bit the blacker because the sinner is found out, will cling to me to the last, Aunt Marian; for to a certainty all my other follies will, and I shall need the leaven of a little charity to lighten them," Kate makes answer, with great apparent good humour; but all the while her heart and her mind are in revolt, against the absolute necessity circumstances have forced upon her of concealing a natural hearty womanly paroxysm of remorse, as she listens to the slighting mention which is being made of a man who had done her a certain good service in by-gone days. A service for which she might never thank him, which she might never acknowledge even, for fear of bringing confusion upon others—a service which he had rendered to her as a woman, and not as the beautiful, bewitching Kate Mervyn, whom most men delighted to serve. But, for all that, a

service which had bound her in such grateful chains to him, that now as she hears unjust, slighting mention made of him, she would give anything to stand forth and proclaim the truth, and say why Graham fell—if she dared.

But somehow or other the consciousness of her own cowardice stung her this day to a sharper degree than it had ever done before. So "she is much gentler and quieter altogether," Mrs. Constable says to the Forests, when luncheon is over, "than she seems to be in society. May is quite taken with her, I assure you; but then May can afford to be generous to other pretty girls, you see."

"Everybody is taken with Kate; May isn't displaying any uncommon generosity," Marian says, uncompromisingly.

"If there is a girl in the world of whom I could be jealous, it is Kate," Gertrude adds by way of making things pleasant. But Mrs. Constable is a tepid natured woman, steeped in a vapour bath of satisfaction with things as they are. And so, in answer to these rather outspoken alarmists, she only says:—

"Ah! my dears! you haven't either of you known what true love is yet. May and Frank have found it out before you, and, I have no more fear of either of them changing, than I have of their not being as happy as my husband and I were, when they are married."

May's mother speaks with a tear or two in her eyes, and the Forest girls feel uncommonly sorry for themselves. "Private theatricals at three o'clock in the afternoon, appalling!" Gertrude thinks, while Marian, with real practical kind-heartedness suggests—

"Mrs. Constable, May can afford to be generous and all that sort of thing of course; but do you quite think she can afford to be indifferent? She thinks no more of what he has written for the stage than if he had merely written a motto for a bon-bon cracker; do you think now that that can please him?"

Mrs. Constable does her best to tackle the question which is asked in earnestness. She wrinkles up her brow, she purses up her mouth, she shakes her head, and she sighs! this last being an utterly mentally-bewildered woman's last resource. Having done all these things, she says, at last, reflectively—

"My dear Marian, I think those wives are wise who let all business cares drop off from their husbands, as soon as they

come home. If May takes my advice (and I shall always be near, I hope, to advise and direct her) she will never refer to anything connected with his work when her husband comes home for peace. Mr. Constable and I were the happiest couple in the world, but I never questioned about what might be going on in his business establishment; he left all those interests behind him, when he left the city, and all through the course of our married life, I never woke him once from his sleep in that arm-chair over there, to ask what he had bought or sold."

"Frank's wares are rather different," Marian says, undauntedly, and Mrs. Constable shakes her head rather sadly, in reply to this, as she answers—

"I know—I know, my dear. He's only a literary man, but if he makes her happy, I will be contented."

The afternoon is becoming very sleepy, conversation flags, and they one and all wish to get apart from one another. Kate finally breaks the chain that binds them, for she requires to rest, and think, rather severely, before she dare trust herself to meet the successful dramatist, her cousin, to-night.

EPILOGUES.

EPILOGUES went out of fashion with pig-tails, the public having at last decided that neither of these appendages was really necessary or particularly ornamental; but a very considerable time elapsed before this opinion was definitely arrived at. The old English moralities or moral plays usually concluded, as Mr. Payne Collier notes, with an epilogue in which prayers were offered up by the actors for the king, queen, clergy and sometimes for the commons; the latest instance of this practice being the epilogue to a play of 1619, *Two Wise Men and all the rest Fools*. "It resteth now," says the "epiloguizer," "that we render you very humble and hearty thanks, and that all our hearts pray for the king and his family's enduring happiness, and our country's perpetual welfare. *Si placet, plaudite.*" So also the dancer entrusted with the delivery of the epilogue to Shakespeare's Second Part of King Henry the Fourth, may be understood as referring to this matter, in the concluding words of his address:—"My tongue is weary; when my legs are too, I will bid you good night:

and so kneel down before you—but, indeed, to pray for the queen." And to this old custom of loyal prayer for the reigning sovereign has been traced the insertion of the words, "Vivat rex," or "Vivat regina," which were wont to appear in the playbills, until quite recent times, when our programmes became the advertising media of the perfumers.

The main object of the epilogue, however, was, as Massinger has expressed it in the concluding address of his comedy, *Believe as you List*—

The end of epilogues is to enquire
The censure of the play, or to desire
Pardon for what's amiss.

Sometimes a sort of bluntness of speech was affected, as in the epilogue to one of Beaumont and Fletcher's comedies:—

Why there should be an epilogue to a play
I know no cause. The old and usual way
For which they were made was to entreat the grace
Of such as were spectators. In this place
And time, 'tis to no purpose; for, I know,
What you resolve already to bestow
Will not be altered, whatsoe'er I say
In the behalf of us, and of the play;
Only to quit our doubts, if you think fit,
You may or cry it up or silence it.

It was in order, no doubt, the more to conciliate the audience that epilogues assumed, oftentimes, a playfulness of tone that would scarcely have been tolerated in the case of prologues. The delivery of an epilogue by a woman (i.e. by a boy playing the part of a woman) was clearly unusual at the time of the first performance of "As you Like it." "It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue," says Rosalind; "but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue. If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue. Yet to good wine they do use good bushes; and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues." There can be little doubt that all Shakespeare's plays were originally followed by epilogues, although but very few of these have been preserved. The only one that seems deficient in dignity, and therefore appropriateness, is that above quoted, spoken by the dancer, at the conclusion of the Second Part of King Henry the Fourth. In no case is direct appeal made, on the author's behalf, to the tender mercies of the audience, although the epilogue to King Henry the Eighth seems to entertain misgivings as to the fate of the play:—

'Tis ten to one this play can never please
All that are here. Some come to take their ease,

An act or two ; but those, we fear,
We have frightened with our trumpets ; so, 'tis clear
They'll say, 'tis naught ; others to hear the city
Abused extremely and to cry—that's witty !
Which we have not done neither ; that, I fear,
All the expected good we're like to hear
For this play at this time, is only in
The merciful construction of good women :
For such a one we showed them.

Prospero delivers the epilogue to the Tempest, and the concluding lines of The Midsummer Night's Dream, and of All's Well that Ends Well—which are not described as epilogues, and should, perhaps, rather be viewed as "tags"—are spoken by Puck and the King. The epilogues to King Henry the Fifth, and to Pericles, are of course spoken by the Chorus, and Gower, respectively, who, throughout those plays, have favoured the spectators with much discourse and explanation. Twelfth Night terminates with the clown's nonsense song, which may be an addition, due less to the dramatist than to the comic actor who first played the part.

The epilogues of the Elizabethan stage, so far as they have come down to us, are, as a rule, brief and discreet enough ; but, after the Restoration, epilogues acquired greater length and much more impudence, to say the least of it, while they clearly had gained importance in the consideration of the audience. And now it became the custom to follow up a harrowing tragedy with a most broadly comic epilogue. The heroine of the night—for the delivering of epilogues now devolved frequently upon the actresses—who, but a few moments before, had fallen a most miserable victim to the dagger or the bowl, as the case might be, suddenly reappeared upon the stage, laughing, alive, and, it may be said, kicking, and favoured the audience with an address designed expressly, it would seem, so to make their cheeks burn with blushes that their recent tears might the sooner be dried up. It is difficult to conceive now, that certain of the prologues and epilogues of Dryden and his contemporaries could ever have been delivered, at any time, upon any stage. Yet they were assuredly spoken, and often by women, apparently to the complete satisfaction of the playgoers of the time. But, concerning the scandalous condition of the stage of the Restoration, there is no need to say anything further. The ludicrous epilogue, which has been described as the unnatural tacking of a comic tail to a tragical head, was certainly popular, however, and long continued so. It was

urged, "that the minds of the audience must be refreshed, and gentlemen and ladies not sent away to their own homes with too dismal and melancholy thoughts about them." Certain numbers of the Spectator were expressly devoted to the discussion of this subject, in the interest, it is now apparent, of Ambrose Phillips, who had brought upon the stage an adaptation of Racine's Andromache, and who enjoyed the zealous friendship of Addison and Steele. To the tragedy of the Distressed Mother, as it was called, which can hardly have been seen in the theatre since the late Mr. Macready, as Orestes, made his first bow to a London audience in 1816, an epilogue had been added which had the good fortune to be accounted the most admirable production of its class. Steele, under the signature of Physibulus, wrote to describe his visit to Drury Lane, in company with his friend, Sir Roger, to witness the new performance. " You must know, sir, that it is always my custom, when I have been well entertained at a new tragedy, to make my retreat before the facetious epilogue enters ; not but that these pieces are often very well written, but, having paid down my half-crown, and made a fair purchase of as much of the pleasing melancholy as the poet's art can afford me, or my own nature admit of, I am willing to carry some of it home with me, and cannot endure to be at once tricked out of all, though by the wittiest dexterity in the world." He describes Sir Roger as entering with equal pleasure into both parts, and as much satisfied with Mrs. Oldfield's gaiety as he had been before with Andromache's greatness ; and continues : " Whether this were no more than an effect of the knight's peculiar humanity, pleased to find that, at last, after all the tragical doings, everything was safe and well, I do not know ; but, for my own part, I must confess I was so dissatisfied, that I was sorry the poet had saved Andromache, and could heartily have wished that he had left her stone dead upon the stage. I found my soul, during the action, gradually worked up to the highest pitch, and felt the exalted passion which all generous minds conceive at the sight of virtue in distress. . . . But the ludicrous epilogue in the close extinguished all my ardour, and made me look upon all such achievements as downright silly and romantic." To this letter a reply, signed Philomedes, appeared in the Spectator, a few days

later, expressing, in the first place, amazement at the attack upon the epilogue, and calling attention to its extraordinary success. "The audience would not permit Mrs. Oldfield to go off the stage the first night till she had repeated it twice; the second night, the noise of the *ancoras* was as loud as before, and she was obliged again to speak it twice; the third night it was still called for a second time: and, in short, contrary to all other epilogues, which are dropped after the third representation of the play, this has already been repeated nine times." Philomedes then points out that, although the prologue and epilogue were real parts of ancient tragedy, they are on the English stage distinct performances, entirely detached from the play, and in no way essential to it. "The moment the play ends," he argues, "Mrs. Oldfield is no more Andromache, but Mrs. Oldfield; and though the poet had left Andromache 'stone dead upon the stage' Mrs. Oldfield might still have spoken a merry epilogue;" and he refers to the well-known instance of Nell Gwynne, in the epilogue to Dryden's tragedy of *Tyrannic Love*, "where there is not only a death but a martyrdom," rising from the stage upon which she was supposed to be lying stone dead—an attempt having been made to remove her by those gentlemen "whose business it is to carry off the slain in our English tragedies"—and breaking out "into that abrupt beginning of what was a very ludicrous but at the same time thought a very good epilogue—

Hold! are you mad? you damned confounded dog,
I am to rise and speak the epilogue!"

"This diverting manner," Philomedes proceeds, "was always practised by Mr. Dryden, who, if he was not the best writer of tragedies in his time, was allowed by every one to have the happiest turn for a prologue or an epilogue." And he further cites the example of a comic epilogue known to be written by Prior to the tragedy of *Phaedra* and *Hippolita*, Addison having supplied the work with a prologue ridiculing the Italian operas. He refers also to the French stage: "Since every one knows that nation, who are generally esteemed to have as polite a taste as any in Europe, always close their tragic entertainment with what they call a *petite pièce* which is purposely designed to raise mirth and send away the audience well pleased. The same person who has supported the chief character in the tragedy very often

plays the principal part in the *petite pièce*; so that I have myself seen at Paris Orestes and Lubin acted the same night by the same man."

This famous epilogue to the *Distressed Mother* is spoken by Andromache, and opens with the following lines, which are certainly flippant enough:—

I hope you'll own that with becoming art
I've played my game and topped the widow's part!
My spouse, poor man, could not live out the play,
But died commendably on his wedding-day;
While I, his relict, made, at one bold fling,
Myself a princess, and young Sty a king.

Of this address the reputed author was Eustace Budgel, of the Inner Temple, whose name is usually found printed in connection with it—"the worthless Budgel," as Johnson calls him—"the man who calls me cousin," as Addison used contemptuously to describe him. In Johnson's Life of Ambrose Philips, however, it is stated that Addison was himself the real author of the epilogue, but that "when it had been at first printed with his name he came early in the morning, before the copies were distributed, and ordered it to be given to Budgel that it might add weight to the solicitation which he was then making for a place." It is probable, moreover, that Addison was not particularly anxious to own a production which, after all, was but a following of an example so questionable as Prior's epilogue to *Phaedra*, above-mentioned. The controversy in the *Spectator* was, without doubt, a matter of pre-arrangement between Addison and Steele, for the entertainment of the public and the increase of the fame of Philips; and the letter of Philomedes, which, with the epilogue in question, has been often ascribed to Budgel, was probably also the work of Addison. For all the rather unaccountable zeal of Addison and Steele on behalf of their friend, however, the reputation of Philips has not thriven; he is chiefly remembered now by the nickname of *Namby-Pamby* bestowed upon him by Pope, who had always vehemently contested his claims to distinction. As Johnson states the case: "Men sometimes suffer by injudicious kindness; Philips became ridiculous, without his own fault, by the absurd admiration of his friends, who decorated him with honorary garlands which the first breath of contradiction blasted." Johnson, by the way, had, at the age of nineteen, written a new epilogue to the *Distressed Mother*, for some young ladies who designed an amateur

performance of that still admired tragedy. The epilogue was intended to be delivered by "a lady who was to personate the ghost of Hermione."

But although protests were now and then, as in this case of the Distressed Mother, raised against the absurdity of the custom, comic epilogues to tragic plays long remained in favour with the patrons of the stage. Pointed reference to this fact is contained in the epilogue spoken by the beautiful Mrs. Hartley to Murphy's tragedy of *Alzuma* produced at Covent Garden in 1773:—

Our play is o'er; now swells each throbbing breast
With expectation of the coming jest.
By Fashion's law, whene'er the Tragic Muse
With sympathetic tears each eye bedews;
When some bright Virtue at her call appears,
Waked from the dead repose of rolling years;
When sacred worthies she bids breathe anew,
That men may be what she displays to view;
By Fashion's law with light fantastic mien
The Comic Sister trips it o'er the scene;
Armed at all points with wit and wanton wiles,
Plays off her airs, and calls forth all her smiles;
Till each fine feeling of the heart be o'er,
And the gay wonder how they wept before!

To Murphy's more famous tragedy of *The Grecian Daughter*, Garrick supplied an epilogue, which commences:—

The Grecian daughter's compliments to all;
Begs that for Epilogue you will not call;
For leering, giggling, would be out of season,
And hopes by me you'll hear a little reason, &c.

The epilogue to Home's tragedy of *Douglas* is simply a remonstrance against the employment of "comic wit," on such an occasion.

An Epilogue I asked; but not one word
Our bard will write. He vows 'tis most absurd
With comic wit to contradict the strain
Of tragedy, and make your sorrows vain.
Saddly he says that pity is the best
And noblest passion of the human breast;
For when its sacred streams the heart o'erflow
In gushes pleasure with the tide of woe;
And when its waves retire, like those of Nile,
They leave behind them such a golden soil
That there the virtues without culture grow
There the sweet blossoms of affection blow.
These were his words; void of delusive art
I felt them; for he spoke them from his heart.
Nor will I now attempt with witty folly
To chase away celestial melancholy.

Apart from the epilogues that pertained to particular plays, and could hardly be detached from them, were the "occasional epilogues," written with no special relevancy to any dramatic work, but rather designed to be recitations or monologue entertainments, that could be delivered at any time, as managers, players, and public might decide. Garrick, who highly esteemed addresses of the class, was wont, in the character of "a

drunken sailor," to recite a much admired "occasional epilogue." Early comedians, such as Joe Haines and Pinkethman, now and then entered upon the scene, "seated upon an ass," to deliver "an occasional epilogue," with more mirthful effect. Extravagances of this kind have usually been reserved for benefit nights, however. In Tom Brown's works, 1730, there is a print of Haines, mounted on an ass, appearing in front of the stage, with a view of the side boxes and pit. An "occasional epilogue," was delivered in 1710, by Powell, and Mrs. Spiller, "on the hardships suffered by lawyers and players in the Long Vacation."

For some years before their extinction, epilogues had greatly declined in worth, although their loss of public favour was less apparent. They were in many cases wretched doggrel, full of slang terms and of impertinence that was both coarse and dull. With a once famous epilogue-writer—Miles Peter Andrews, who was also a dramatist, although, happily, his writings for the stage have now vanished completely—Gifford deals severely in his *Baviad*. "Such is the reputation this gentleman has obtained for epilogue-writing, that the minor poets of the day, despairing of emulating, are now only solicitous of assisting him—happy if they can obtain admission for a couplet or two into the body of his immortal works, and thus secure to themselves a small portion of that popular applause so lavishly and so justly bestowed on everything that bears the signature of Miles Andrews!" A few lines make havoc of quite a covey of "bards" of that period.

Too much the applause of fashion I despise;
For mark to what 'tis given and then declare,
Mean though I am, if it be worth my care.
Is it not given to Este's unmeaning dash,
To Topham's fustian, Colman's flippant trash,
To Andrews' doggrel, when three wits combine,
To Morton's catchword, Greathead's idiot line,
And Holcroft's Shug Lane cant, and Merry's Moorfield's whine, &c.

Criticism was not mealy-mouthed in Gifford's day.

The tag appears to be following the epilogue to oblivion; for though it is difficult to differentiate them, the tag must not be confused with the epilogue, or viewed as merely an abbreviated form of it. As a rule, the epilogue was divided from the play by the fall of the curtain, although this could hardly have been the case in regard to the epilogue mentioned above, delivered by "Mrs. Ellen," as

Dryden calls her, after the tragedy of Tyrannic Love. But the tag is usually the few parting words addressed by the leading character in a play, before the curtain descends upon it, to "our kind friends in front," entreating their applause. The final couplets of a French vaudeville, it may be noted, usually contain an appeal of this kind; otherwise, tags and epilogues are alike eschewed upon the French stage. But this "coming forward" of the player, to deliver his tag, is a practice of old date. The concluding speech in Massinger's New Way to Pay Old Debts, addressed to the audience, and commencing:—

Nothing wants then
But your allowance—and in that our all
Is comprehended,

s according to the old stage direction, to be spoken by Wellborn "coming forward." So also Cozimo is directed to "come forward," to address to the audience the last lines of the Great Duke of Florence.

Epilogues have rarely been employed as supplementary acts, continuing and completing the action of a play, as prologues in modern times have been converted into introductory chapters, explanatory of events to be presently exhibited upon the scene. Yet the interminable drama of Marie Antoinette, by Signor Paolo Giacometti, in which Madame Ristori lately performed in London, is an instance of this kind. Marie Antoinette is in five acts, with a prologue exhibiting the queen's life at Versailles, in 1786, and an epilogue showing her imprisonment in the Conciergerie, and her march to the guillotine in the custody of Samson the executioner.

SEASON SONG.

"SWEET love," said I, "'tis the birth of the year,
The snow is gone, and the roses are blowing;
O say my hope may banish my fear,
For my love grows strong as the flowers are growing."
And she said, for the thrush's glad note was ringing,
"No need of love when the birds are singing."
"Sweet love," said I, "'tis the summer's prime,
And the leafy earth is a sea of gladness;
O make it my perfect summer time,
Of sunlit joy after wintry sadness."
And she said, and her voice was sweetly mellow,
"No need of love when the corn is yellow."
"Sweet love," said I, "the year grows old;
But many a beauty still is staying;
O be your love like the autumn gold
To gild brown leaves too soon decaying."
And she said, for the reapers and gleaners were come;
"No need of love at the harvest-home."
"Sweet love," said I, "the year is dead,
And the trees are bare in the killing frost;
The birds are silent, the roses are fled,
And my hope, like the sunshine, is almost lost."
And she said, "I take my heart from its cover,
For winter is cold without a lover."

LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE: LOCAL TRADITIONS OF THE BATTLE OF NASEBY.

THICK as the white and orange lichens that blotch the old embattled tower of Naseby church, traditions of Charles and Cromwell cluster around this Northamptonshire battle-field. To enable our readers better to appreciate them, we will briefly epitomise the events that preceded this last downfall of the Cavalier cause.

The great battle of Naseby was fought on June 14, 1645. In the July of the preceding year Cromwell had shattered the king's forces at Marston Moor, near York. In every battle between the close-cropped sad-faced Puritan and the long-haired dare-devil Cavalier the grapple was now growing closer and more deadly. One last struggle for life or death took place on the high moor ground between Market Harborough and Daventry. Charles, unwilling to be cooped up in Oxford, had marched out of that loyal city with ten thousand good men and true, and had been soon after joined by his nephews, Prince Rupert and Prince Maurice. He raised the siege of Chester; while Fairfax was investing Oxford, and Cromwell guarding the Eastern Counties he had long nursed so carefully; and took Leicester by storm, where, among other prisoners locked up, was one John Bunyan, a common soldier in the Parliamentary army. Fairfax immediately galloped into Northamptonshire to checkmate the king, and getting the House of Commons to appoint Cromwell lieutenant-general of his horse, sent for him post haste from the Isle of Ely, where he was busy organising a God-fearing militia. Cromwell joined Fairfax about six a.m. on June 13, while a council of war was holding, with six hundred trusty "dragoons and horse" from the associated Eastern counties.

But a word about the field on which the Cavaliers and Puritans were about to jostle.

Naseby, a little obscure Northamptonshire village, seventy-eight miles from London, twelve from Northampton, and six from Market Harborough, rises on an eminence of land, once moor, which claims now, as it did then, to be the very centre or almost the very centre of England. The place stands upwards of four hundred feet higher than the level of the Thames in London, and from one portion of it called Gallows-furlong (an ancient place of

execution), it has been observed that the rain which falls on the east side of it flows towards the German sea, while that which falls on the west tends towards the Irish sea, whence local antiquaries were apt to call Naseby, most probably erroneously, the highest ground in the kingdom.

The blood-soaked field is at present an innocent piece of dull corn land and pasture, of some six thousand acres, and some twenty miles in circumference. On the south lie the lordships of Thornby and Cold Ashby, on the west Sulby, on the north Sibbertoft and Clipstone, on the east Kelmarsh, Haselbeech, and Cottesbrook, obscure fields and hamlets now, but on the 14th of June, 1645, full of angry and frightened faces, fiery-faced pursuers, pale fugitives, rejoicing sutlers and weeping women, Rupert's savage troopers and Cromwell's sabring horsemen.

The people of the village, which, a few years ago, consisted of some one hundred cottages, are very long-lived—so much so that the oldest of them are known in Northamptonshire markets as "Naseby children." Naseby, in fact, stands high above the valleys, bogs, and damps, a fact which perhaps accounts for a farmer of Naseby, named Corby, living to his ninety-fourth year, and cutting a complete new set of teeth at the infantine age of seventy. It is remarked that these upland dwellers talk in a shout as if, amid the winds and storms of the high land, low and gentle speech was ineffective.

The straggling village is a long parallelogram, dragging on from north to south some two-thirds of a mile. The place is supposed to have been once wooded, as the framework of the better houses is chiefly oak; and as the roads were formerly always bad, and the village stood high, it is reasonably conjectured that the oak used in the cottages once grew near the spot. The names round Naseby seem also to point to former woods, as the district to the south is called Knutcoat, and a mile and a half off stand the villages of Haselbeech and Thornby.

In the two-thirds pasture and one of arable, the red soil is now devoted to rye, the stronger and blacker lands to wheat and barley. The swine here are famous for their size. The land is here and there boggy—the soil gravel and peat. Naseby is full of springs, no fewer than six rising in the village, and several others in the lordship; and the water running down the hills is collected in artificial ponds.

Several rivers rise in this battle field. The lesser Avon starts from a spring near the church, to divide the counties of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, and to find its way by Tewkesbury into the Severn. The river Nen rises from Chapell Well spring, and eventually falls into the sea at Lynn. The river Welland has its source near the vicarage at Sibbertoft, and the river Tse from Naseby springs. A certain spring of blueish water called Warren's Well, where many a Cavalier's horse must have slaked its thirst—is especially attractive to cattle, perhaps from its colour or some subtle odour unappreciable by man. St. Dennis's well, a mile west of the village, was once used as a bath for rheumatic patients, and children were formerly often brought to be dipped there after the old superstitious formula, nine mornings in succession. It is now bushed in with sedge and mantled with weeds. On Scrough Hill there is a chalybeate spring, of a petrifying quality.

There is little timber now round Naseby. Ash, however, grows here and there in the fences and hedgerows, and there are a few elms, oaks, and sycamores; firs thrive well; fruit trees badly; but the Spanish broom flourishes. Naseby stands so high that on a clear day from the old bank, on which a windmill once stood, thirty-nine or forty parish churches can be seen with the naked eye, the furthest towers being Houghton-on-the-Hill, eighteen miles distant, and Hunslope in Buckinghamshire, twenty-two miles away. Bilsdon Coppice in Leicestershire, twenty miles off, can be pitched on, and eight miles to the south Charles might have seen Holmby House, where Colonel Joyce plucked him from the hands of the Parliamentary commissioners, and removed him to the army. In the extreme dim blue horizon run the hills of Mountsorrel in Leicestershire. There are plenty of hares in Naseby fields, partridges in autumn, and, in the winter, snipes, wild geese, ducks, and grey and whistling plover. The large, white-headed eagle of Norway has been seen on the grassy heights, as well as sand-pipers, and curlews in March and October. The fox-hounds of Althorpe and Pytchley are not unacquainted with the gorse of Naseby.

From Naseby spire a good glass can discern Boston Deeps, an arm of the sea, about sixty miles away in Lincolnshire. Three p.m., when the sun is in the proper direction, and the air is free from vapours,

is the best hour for this long shot. On the top of Naseby spire is poised a large copper ball that will hold sixty gallons. This ball was brought by Sir Gyles Allington from Boulogne, when that town was taken by the English in the reign of Henry the Eighth, and he placed it on the cupola of his house at Horseleck, in Cambridgeshire, from whence it was sold about 1789. The church font is very old and has been used for total immersion, a sure proof of age in fonts. On the treble bell of the church is engraved "King Charles of Britain, France, and Ireland," and the date 1633. The church is built of stone from the quarries of Weldon, Haslebeech, and Harlstone. The great festival at Naseby is on Trinity Monday, which is called Rothwell Fair Monday. The old church bells are then rung, and there is the usual amount of dancing and drinking. There are remains of a rood loft in the church, and on the carved pulpit stands the iron frame of the old hour-glass.

In Domesday Book (Navesbury) Naseby appears to have belonged to William Peverel (a natural son of the Conqueror), who held seven hides there. The inhabitants were eight villanes, a priest, two socomen, and eleven cottagers. The lands of Peverel escheating to the crown, they were granted to Guy de la Val, who paid Henry the Second's exchequer twenty shillings for the lordship.

Naseby was then claimed in the reign of King John by Roger de Lacey, Constable of Chester, who fought with the Crusaders at the siege of Damietta. This Roger, who saved the Earl of Chester from the Welsh by raising an army of minstrels at Chester Fair, established a Tuesday market at Naseby. The stump of the old market cross (injured in 1755), still exists in the market-place at Naseby. The manor often changed hands, passing from the Earl of Gloucester to the Earl of Albemarle, from Lord Bourchier to the Duke of Buckingham. In 1720 (the South Sea year, when many lands changed hands), Charles Joye, Esq., bought it, and built a new Manor House.

A third part of the lordship was, for several generations, in the hands of the Shuckburgh family, whose old family house was pulled down in 1773, and the materials used to build a farm-house. Many ancient coins were found in the foundations. The timber, oak, felled in winter with the bark on, had bidden complete defiance to time. The old family oak table has been preserved, and with it a tradition. It was at this table,

on the eve of the battle, that a party of Rupert's horse were surprised by Ireton's men "as they were sitting down to supper." A fine spring of soft limpid water flows through a stone reservoir in the cellar, for Naseby is a village of springs.

From a book written by Joshua Sprigge, chaplain to General Fairfax, we gain a clear view of the battle, which we shall amplify and clarify by means of the local traditions of Naseby, as collected by the worthy Vicar of the place, the Rev. John Mastin, in 1792. On the 12th of June, says the exulting Sprigge, Fairfax's army marched to Gulsborough, four miles west of Northampton, and five miles from Charles's outposts at Borough Hill, a body of Parliament horse surprised the enemy, beat up their camp, and took some prisoners. The king was carelessly hunting at the time near Daventry, and the cavalry horses were all at grass. A fierce attack on the Cavaliers might have been a great success, but the foot were far behind, and night was coming on, so nothing more was done; Fairfax, fearing a Cavalier foray, rode up and down by his horse and foot guards till five in the morning, and, forgetting his pass-word, was detained a long time by a stubborn sentinel. At three a.m., as he came within a mile and a half of Floor, where there was an outpost of Cavalier cavalry, Fairfax saw the enemy riding fast over Borough Hill, and apparently firing their tents and beginning to march. About five a.m. General Watson, the scout master, brought certain news that the enemy were drawing off Borongh Hill, where they had stood in arms all night, and were pushing toward Harborough.

About six a.m., as we have said, Cromwell arrived, to the exultation of the whole camp, at the very time Fairfax was holding his council of war. A strong party of horse was at once sent to Daventry, under trusty Major Harrison, and another strong party under Colonel Ireton were to fall on the enemy's flank, if a weak point offered, while Fairfax, with the main body, marched to flank Charles's surprised army, on the way to Harborough, camping that night at Gilling. The country people welcomed the Parliament men with joy, as the Cavaliers had plundered everywhere, even selling the poor Northamptonshire children to the Irish camp followers, who expected good ransom for their return.

The Cavaliers' van was that night with Prince Rupert at Harborough, the rear

within two miles of Naseby. Upon this rash but unsuspecting rear, Ireton fell that night, taking prisoners many of Rupert's life guards and Langdale's brigade. At four p.m., Charles hearing of this, and hitherto quite unconscious that Fairfax and Cromwell were so close upon him, rode in the emergency to Harborough; and "resting on a chair in a low room," sent and woke up Rupert, to hold a council of war. It was decided, though with some distrust, that Charles could not push on to Leicester, or go on his way to relieve Pontefract and Scarborough, without leaving his rear at the mercy of Fairfax. The Cavaliers had more cavalry than Cromwell, and they relied on their infantry; so Charles, against the opinion of his chief officers, resolved to fight it out then and there, and moreover, not to wait for Fairfax, but to march straight upon him.

On Saturday, June fourteenth, at three a.m., Fairfax marched from Gilling towards Naseby, intending to press the king hard with his cavalry, till his foot could come up, in case Charles had pushed on, towards Leicester. By five a.m. Fairfax reached the chosen rendezvous at Naseby, where his spies brought word that the enemy was at Harborough, still seeming irresolute whether to stand or retreat. But at that very moment plumes began to show, and armour to sparkle on the hill, the Naseby side of Harborough, and no doubt remained that King Charles had at last taken heart, and was advancing to join battle. The drums at once were ordered to beat, the trumpets to sound, and both armies began to draw up in full battalion. While massing his troops, and studying the most advantageous ground for a fight, Fairfax and his men saw Charles's army loom suddenly over the hill, trying to "get the wind of him." Upon this Fairfax drew down his army into a large fallow field, north-west of Naseby, flanked on the left hand by a hedge. He also, in his stolid way, occupied the ledge of a hill running east, and drew up his army there, fronting Charles's men, but keeping one hundred paces below the highest ground, so as to hide the form of his battle, and conceal any hurry and confusion from the Cavaliers. The enemy perceiving this withdrawal, at once leaped to the conclusion, in their usual rash and contemptuous way, that Fairfax was flying to Northampton, which so hurried their

advance, that they left many of their guns behind them.

From a curious old plan of the battle published by Rushworth, Fairfax's secretary, who was present at the event, we gain a clear view of the two armies—the gay, eager Cavaliers, and the grave, stubborn Puritans. Just below Dust hill, where the king's baggage waggons dotted the horizon, came the right wing of the Royal Cavalry, led by fiery Rupert and his brother, Prince Maurice; while the left wing of Newark horse was headed by Sir Marmaduke Langdale. The king himself took the command of the main body of infantry, with Sir Barnard Astley on his right, and Sir George Lisle on the left; while, as reserve behind him, were Colonel Howard's horse, and his own and Prince Rupert's regiments of foot.

Pale, sour faces stared at them from Cromwell's ranks on the right wing, and from Ireton's ranks on the left. The Puritan reserves were headed by Lieutenant-General Pride, Colonel Hammond, and Colonel Rainsborough—Pride's rear phalanx of pikemen and musketeers being posted near Mill hill, just in front of Naseby village, and Colonel Riche's, and Colonel Fleetwood's regiments of horse, below, not far from the baggage train, which was ringed with firelock men.

A carbine shot below the brow of the hill, where the pikemen of Sir Hardress Waller's, Colonel Pickering's, and Montague's regiments massed, Fairfax had placed a forlorn hope of three hundred of Skippon's musketeers, while he himself rode in front of his own regiment, near Colonel Whalley's regiment, the extreme left of Cromwell's terrible right wing.

So the battle was joined. The field word for the king that day was, "Queen Mary;" for the Parliament "God our strength."

A move in the saddle, a dash of the spur, a toss of plumes, a gleam of swords, and down came Rupert on Ireton's left wing, which rode down the brow of the hill to meet him as strides a sturdy swimmer forward to breast a breaker. Rupert and his men pulling up sharp, as if surprised at this readiness, Ireton and his men halted too, partly from mere imitation, and partly that the ground was rough, and the right and left divisions did not quite keep pace. Colonel Butler's regiment, Colonel Vermuyden's and Ireton's own were all pushing on together, while Colonel Riche's and Fleetwood's regiments waited for the trumpet, as did the troops

which Cromwell had brought with him from the Eastern Counties. Again Rupert advanced, and Ireton then sounding a charge, leaped at him like a tiger.

What a flutter of scarfs and feathers as the two seas met! what a chink of steel! what a tinker-like hammering at steel cap and breastplate! Of Ireton's three right hand divisions of horse, two charged home, and routed the sons of Belial, but one missing its cue, the two left divisions being rather too slow, received the full shock of Rupert's wild and swaggering Hectors. Ireton then seeing Sir Bernard Astley's brigade of foot pressing sore on Skippon's pikemen, ordered his division to charge the enemy, and fell himself headlong on Astley's musketeers, but was overpowered—his horse was shot under him, his thigh pierced with a pike, his face was struck with a halbert, and he himself for the time taken prisoner.

In the meantime, Cromwell had broken in like a torrent on Sir Marmaduke Langdale, and his Northern and Newark horse, and had broken them up as a fist would a band-box. Never did sabres more sharply impress the doctrine of resistance to tyranny, and never did Cromwell's men strike harder or surer. The Cavaliers fought well too, fired at the last moment, and came hotly to the sword; but Oliver broke the Cavalier horse to pieces, and pursued them beyond their foot, and near a quarter of a mile from the battle field.

Nor had the two main bodies been all this time inactive. Astley's and Lisle's pikes and musketeers had met Waller's, Skippon's, Pickering's, and Montagne's men, and fought foot to foot. The alacrity, confidence, and rush of the Cavaliers had at first pressed back the Puritan's front divisions—all, indeed, except Fairfax's own regiment—and the men, as they fell back, had mixed with the reserves of Pride, Hammond, and Rainsborough. The latter advancing, however, like a wall of steel, repelled the King's men, and at last, with surly shouts, push of pikes, blows of halberds, and splashing fire of musketry, drove them to hopeless rout. Brave Major-General Skippon was shot badly in the side, and Fairfax desired him to leave the field; but the tough old man replied, bluntly, "I'll not stir as long as a man will stand." And he waited accordingly, till the last blow was struck.

All this time Rupert was driving among Ireton's shattered left division, who were impeded by ditches and pools of water,

and scattered them almost to Naseby. It was at this disagreeable moment that Rushworth himself was startled by a wild apparition.

"A party of theirs," he says, "that broke through the left wing of horse, came quite behind the rear to our train; the leader of them being a person somewhat in habit like the general, in a red montero, as the general (Fairfax) had. He came as a friend; our commander of the guard of the train went with his hat, and asked him, How the day went? thinking it had been the general. The Cavalier, who we soon heard was Rupert, asked him and the rest if they would have quarter? They cried, 'No!' gave fire, and instantly beat them off. It was a happy deliverance, without doubt."

At the same moment Cromwell's cavalry having broken to fragments the Cavalier horse, had started off to keep the rest of Rupert's cavalry from coming to the rescue of the discomfited foot of the central battle, all being smashed up there except the brave section of pikemen, halberdiers, and musketeers, who had repulsed countless attacks on their flanks, front, and rear, till Fairfax called up his own regiment of foot, hurried on by Cromwell, who at once fell on the Cavaliers with the butt-end of their muskets. Fairfax, at the same time, gave them a shock with his cavalry, which finally sent them to the four winds. The king had now only the horse left, and with them he remained; for Fairfax could not charge him till the Roundhead foot had come up, and they were a quarter of a mile off. They soon came cheering loudly, well rallied, and formed in between the two wings of victorious horse, within carbine shot of the enemy, in a firm battalion. The king, eager for a fresh fight, did all he could to encourage his cavalry, calling out, "One charge more, and we recover the day." But the Roundhead dragoons had already thrown themselves from their horses and opened fire from the hedges on the shaken Royalists. There, massed together, dark and threatening as thunder-clouds, stood Fairfax's and Cromwell's men—horse, foot, and artillery; while the Royalist foot and guns were gone for ever. A moment's wavering look, and the king's ranks loosened, shook, and broke; and far over the plain the frightened horsemen, who, a short time before, had been so furious and cruel in the onslaught, scattered and fled. Fairfax's horse pursued some fourteen

miles, nearly, indeed, to the walls of Leicester, slaying, beating down, and taking prisoner.

About four thousand private soldiers were taken, besides six colonels, eight lieutenant-colonels, eighteen majors, seventy captains, eighty lieutenants, eighty ensigns, two hundred inferior officers, and many of the king's inferior household servants. There were also captured all the king's artillery (twenty-two brass pieces of ordnance), eight thousand arms, forty barrels of powder, two hundred horse, and all the plunder of Leicester. The king's and the Duke of York's colours and four of the Queen's white colours with double crosses, beside one hundred other horse and foot flags were left to the victors. Above all Cromwell's men captured the king's cabinet (full of dangerous letters), and all his coaches and personal baggage.

Colonel John Fieanes, who was sent to London with the prisoners, took with him eleven colours. There was also captured, says Sprigge, a wooden image, which the Cavaliers blasphemously called "the god of the Roundheads," and had carried about in procession, in contempt of the Puritan army just before the battle began. The king lost twenty officers and some six hundred private soldiers. Most of the Cavalier prisoners were lodged that night in Harborough church, but the wounded were sent on to Northampton. Fairfax marched that victorious night five miles to Harborough, and made that his headquarters.

"An old man now living," says Mr. Mastin, in his history of Naseby, "remembers very well to have been told by his grandfather, that he was then a strong boy, about nine or ten years old, and was keeping cows in the field during the whole time of the battle, that he was present at the burial of the dead, which was done by the country people coming in from all quarters; some were stripped, others buried in their clothes; but in general so shallow, that the bodies, in a short time, became very offensive, that liquid issued from the graves and ran several yards upon the ground, which, having subsided, the cattle ate those spots, for several years, remarkably bare. The graves are still very visible, but are become concave, and water stands in them in the winter season."

"A friend of mine," says Mr. Carlyle, "has in his cabinet, two ancient grinder teeth, dug lately from that ground, and waits for

an opportunity to rebury them there. Sound effectual grinders, one of them very large; which ate their breakfast on the fourteenth morning of June, two hundred years ago, and, except to be clenched once in grim battle, had never work to do more in this world!—'A stack of dead bodies, perhaps about one hundred, had been buried in this trench; piled as in a wall, a man's length thick; the skeletons lay in courses, the heads of one course to the heels of the next. One figure, by the strange position of the bones, gave us the hideous notion of its having been thrown in before death! The bones were treated with all piety; watched rigorously, over Sunday, till they could be covered in again.' Sweet friends, for Jesus' sake forbear!'"

It is said, that in this action, a commander of the king's, knowing Cromwell, advanced briskly from the head of his troops, to exchange a single bullet with him, and was with equal bravery encountered by him, both sides forbearing to come in, till their pistols were discharged. The Cavalier, then, with a slanting back blow of a broadsword, chancing to cut the ribbon that held Cromwell's morion, with a jerk threw it off his head; just as he was going to repeat his stroke, Cromwell's party came in and rescued him; and one of them alighting, threw up his head-piece into his saddle, which he hastily catching, clapped it on the wrong way, and so bravely fought with it the rest of the day.

This iron cap or head-piece, covered with black velvet, was in 1792 in the possession of a Mr. Cromwell (a relation of the Protector's) who resided in Essex-street in the Strand; and was clerk to St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

Fairfax's despatch after Naseby contains some characteristic touches of Cromwell.

"Had not Major-Gen. Skippon," says Fairfax, "done gallantly, he had not received such an early wound in his side; and had he not had a spring of resolution, he had not stayed in the field as he did, till the battle was ended; for being desired by His Excellencie to go off the field, he answered, he would not stirre, so long as a man would stand. That I mention not all those officers and soldiery particularly, who behaved themselves so gallantly in this action, is to avoyd emulation and partiality; I shall satisfie myself to adde concerning them, and the whole busenisse, the words of the General,

and Lieutenant-General, in their several letters to the speaker of the House of Commons, with which I shall conclude. ‘Honest men served you faithfully in this action; Sir, they are trusty; I beseech you in the name of God, not to discourage them; (which they have not done, blessed be God, and I hope never will.) He proceeds, and wisheth, this action may beget thankfulness and humility in all that are concerned in it;’ and concludes thus modestly himself, ‘He that ventures his life for the liberty of his country, I wish he trust God for the liberty of his conscience, and you for the liberty he fights for,’ &c. All that I desire,” says the General, “is that the honour of this great, never-to-be-forgotten mercy, may be given to God, in an extraordinary day of Thanksgiving, and that it may be improved to the good of his church, which shall be faithfully endeavoured by, Sir, your most humble servant, THOMAS FAIRFAX.”

Rastell, in his history of Southwell, relates a curious story of the apparition of Lord Strafford appearing to Charles when he was hesitating at Daventry a month before Naseby. It, at least, serves to show the vacillation and superstition of the weak monarch.

“About two hours,” says this writer, “after the king had retired to rest, some of his attendants hearing an uncommon noise in his chamber, went into it, when they found his majesty sitting up in bed, and much agitated, but nothing which could have produced the noise they fancied they heard. The king, in a trembling voice, inquired after the cause of their alarm, and told them how much he had been agitated in a dream, by thinking he saw the apparition of Lord Strafford, who, after upbraiding him with unkindness, told him he was come to return good for evil, and that he advised him by no means to fight the Parliament army that was at that time quartered at Northampton; for in it was one whom the king could never conquer by arms. Prince Rupert, in whom courage was the predominant quality, rated the king out of his apprehensions the next day, and a resolution was again taken to meet the enemy. The next night, however, the apparition appeared to him a second time, but with looks of anger, assuring him that would be the last advice he should be permitted to give him; but that, if he kept his resolution of fighting, he was undone.

If his majesty had taken the advice of the friendly ghost, and marched northward the next day, where the Parliament had few English forces, and where the Scots were becoming very discontented, his affairs might, perhaps, still have had a prosperous issue; or, if he had marched immediately into the west, to join the Lord Goreinge, who had there a good body of horse, he might afterwards have fought on more equal terms. But the king, fluctuating between the apprehensions of his imagination and the reproaches of his courage, remained another whole day at Daintree in a state of inactivity.”

“The day after his majesty arrived at Southwell, walking about the town, as it was his practice to do,” says the same writer, “he went into the shop of one James Lee, a fanatical shoemaker. Finding his person was not known, he entered into conversation with Crispin, and, in the end, was measured for a pair of shoes. Lee had no sooner taken his majesty’s foot into his hand to measure him, than, eyeing him very attentively, he was suddenly seized with a panick and would not go on. The king, surprised at his behaviour, pressed him to proceed; but Crispin absolutely refused, saying, he was the customer himself had been warned of in his sleep the night before; that he was doomed to destruction, and those would never thrive who worked for him. The forlorn monarch, whose misfortunes had opened his mind to the impressions of superstition, uttered an ejaculation expressive of his resignation to the will of Providence, and retired to the palace, which was the place of his abode.”

Banks, in his life of Cromwell, mentions a curious tradition that the Protector was buried at Naseby, the scene of his last great final victory, and not, as was supposed, in Westminster Abbey.

“Much has been said, and many doubts have arisen relative to the burial-place of the Protector Cromwell; and the author of the Compleat History of England observes that it still remains a question where his body was really buried. ‘It was,’ says he, ‘in appearance in Westminster Abbey. Some report he was carried below bridge and thrown into the Thames. But it is most probable that it was buried in Naseby Field. This account,’ he continues, ‘is given as ready to be deposited, if occasion required, by Mr. Barkstead, the regicide’s son, who was about fifteen years old at the time of Cromwell’s death;’ that

the said Barkstead, his father, being Lieutenant of the Tower, and a great confidant of Cromwell's, did, among other such confidants in the time of his illness, desire to know where he would be buried; to which the Protector answered, 'where he had obtained the greatest victory and glory, and as nigh the spot as could be guessed, where the heat of the action was, viz., in the field at Naseby in Northampton.' At midnight, soon after his death, the body (being at first embalmed and wrapped in a leaden coffin), was in a hearse conveyed to the said field, Mr. Barkstead himself attending, by order of his father, close to the hearse. Being come to the field, they found about the midst of it a grave dug about nine feet deep, with the green sod carefully laid on one side, and the mould on the other; in which the coffin being put, the grave was instantly filled up, and the green sod laid exactly flat upon it; care being taken that the surplus mould should be clean removed. Soon after the like care was taken that the ground should be ploughed up, and it was sowed successively with corn.' Several other material circumstances, says the fore-mentioned author, the said Mr. Barkstead (who now frequents Richards's Coffee House within Temple Bar), relates relative to this burial."

The following enigmatical anecdote used to be current at Naseby. "Some years ago," went the story, "on a Shrove Tuesday, two women of the village had a violent dispute in the churchyard; from words they proceeded to blows, and fought most furiously; when a man, who was shot at the battle of Naseby, came out of a grave and parted them."

The fact was, one Humphrey Thompson, a parishioner of Naseby, and quartermaster to King Charles, valiantly fighting for his royal master in this field, was wounded, but not mortally; he, after quitting the army, was made parish-clerk and sexton, and was digging a grave when the above-mentioned quarrel happened.

WE THREE.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER IV.

My husband left me at Schwalbach, after seeing me settled in a quiet lodging with my maid. All throughout the journey he had been silent and downcast. He had grown thin, and had lost the look of bright vigour which was formerly his most striking characteristic. He was restless,

too. He would go out alone, to take long walks, from which he returned pale, and weary, and unrefreshed.

We travelled by short stages, for I was still weak. But at length that dreary journey came to an end. The last day, on the evening before George was to leave me, I said to him, "Will you let me know where to address a letter to you, George? I shall have to write to you."

He started, and looked sharply round at me, as he answered, "Let you know where to write? Of course. What a question!"

"I suppose you will not spend a very long time en route?"

"I shall travel as fast as I can go, night and day."

As he said it, he rose up and walked to the window, as though he were impatient to be gone at once. He was like a creature cramped in a cage, that longs to stretch its limbs in freedom.

"I am sorry," said I, "that you should have had to make this slow, irksome journey with me. I would not have suggested coming with you, if I had not had a certain object in view."

He was still standing at the window, with his face turned away from me.

"Have I complained of the slowness of the journey?" he said, irritably. "Why do you make these indirect reproaches, Désirée?"

"I make no reproaches. It is very natural that you should have found this journey utterly wearisome and depressing."

George put his hand up to his head, and sighed out, under his breath, "Ah—h—h! I'm so tired of it all!"

Yes; he was "tired of it all." I knew that he was so. Well—it should end.

In my solitude—I was very solitary; it was yet early in the summer and the place was nearly empty of strangers—my resolution grew and strengthened itself. I was getting rapidly stronger. And with returning strength, grew the desire for action and employment. I could no longer sit and stare at the blue sky for hours at a stretch, as I had done in the first days of my recovery. I had made up my mind to write a letter to George. But I had not decided on what day I would write it, nor even very precisely the words I should use. I was clear as to what I would say, but all uncertain as to how I should say it.

One morning I went out alone, as usual, and after walking a little way through the

woods, I sat down at the foot of a great beech tree, and looked along an avenue, all full of soft green light—like the light which comes through sea-water—filtered through the fresh young foliage. At first I saw the trees, and the leaf-shadows dappling their silver stems and trembling and changing as a little breeze blew fitfully. But soon it was a very different vision I was contemplating. It was the vision of three past years, whose months and days passed by in procession. And I looked at them, as they came one by one out of the dim caves of memory, as at a picture being slowly unrolled before me.

I saw it all like a revelation! I saw George Lester as he first came into my father's house, handsome, smiling, joyous; taking all the good things of this life which fell to his share, as easily and as lightly as though showers of good things were as common as rain. He was prosperous, strong, self-confident. To him, the utterances of a soul perplexed by the great problems of this mysterious existence in which it finds itself, seemed as meaningless as the inarticulate murmurs of one talking in his sleep. Indeed his answer to such utterances was always, in effect, "Come, come, wake up! You're dreaming." Then to this bright, cheerful creature, to whom life was such a pleasant thing, undimmed by any shadow from the sorrows of other people, I saw linked—myself, to be his comrade in the march through life!

When I became George's wife, he expected, no doubt, to see me brighten and glow like a flower in the sunshine. He took it for granted—as he took for granted that all things pleasant to him would and must happen; they seemed so natural!—that our wedded life was to be epitomised in the story-book sentence "so they married, and lived happy ever after." He had an exaggerated estimate of my intellect and attainments. But at the same time he regarded me with that sort of indefinite pity, which the doer so often feels for the thinker. And his admiration and his compassion combined to make up the sentiment which had impelled him to marry me. He would be so kind to, and so fond of, "poor little Désirée," that she would be as happy as the day was long. And, of course, he would be happy too. I do not think that he ever was troubled with a doubt on that subject.

How clear it all seemed to me now, as I looked back! Motive, and expectation,

and failure, all seemed to be explained, now that it was too late. "Too late!" The thought made me spring to my feet with a sudden impulse. I hastened home, and sat down at once, without pause or deliberation, to write to George. So, and so only, must that letter be written. I have it here before me. It was returned to me, with other papers—afterwards. This is my letter.

"We have been very unhappy, George. I do not know that we were either of us much to blame. Let us part. The past cannot be undone. But why should all the rest of your life be clouded by the shadow of my sadness? Let us part. Do you know why I sent away Amy Bent before I left England? It was because I had already the fixed idea that I should never return to my home there. And I wished to know that she was safe in kind hands. I have been so sorry for you, George. It is only since I have seen how happy and joyous you might have been in the society of a woman congenial to you, that I have understood what a fatal error I made in consenting to be your wife. I will repair it as far as may be. Let us part. I could not speak to you of this while you were still with me. But now that I have once declared openly what has been long in my heart, I feel that I shall be able to talk to you freely. When your business is accomplished, come back to this place, and let us consult together as friends. In this country we may be able to arrange our separation so as to give you real, absolute freedom—freedom to be happy in your own way. That is what I wish. Believe it, George. Believe that what I now say is the simple truth, unmixed with any bitterness of feeling. Although I am now writing as rapidly as the pen will move over the paper, yet this act, so quickly accomplished, is the result of slow deliberation. I have pondered long, before yielding myself up to this project. But now it is absolute master of my life, and must be obeyed. Write to me, I pray of you, with the same sincerity which I have used towards you. You may trust me."

I had reckoned how many days must elapse before I could receive an answer to this letter; and I had made up my mind to wait patiently for it. How I passed those days of waiting is soon told, as regards my external life. But of the agitation of my mind; the fluctuating conjectures I made as to what would be

George's line of conduct; the painful doubt and darkness I was in respecting the spirit in which he had received my letter —of all this I can give no coherent account.

At length, and nearly as soon as I had calculated that it was possible, came a letter from George. I locked the door of my room, and sat down to read it. I had a strange sensation of the unreality and intangibility of all the objects around me, as I sat there alone, tearing open the cover of the letter, which I am unable to describe, but which I well remember. I scarcely felt the paper between my fingers. My feet seemed to rest on clouds rather than on the solid floor of the room. And when I had unfolded the pages of the letter I did not see what was written on them for a long while; or for what seemed to me a long while. At length I read—this:

"You know I am not good at writing, Désirée. I cannot express myself as well as you do, who are clever with your pen as you are clever at everything. But I must try to answer you as well as I can. For although I shall come back to Schwalbach as soon as possible, yet I shall not be able to get away before the end of the month, and I must not leave you without an answer all that time. Désirée, when I married you, Heaven knows I was as fond of you as man could be, and I wished to make you happy, and I put you before all the world in my mind. But I soon found that you were not happy and contented. You despised all my friends, you hated my country, and you treated me like an oaf, who could be pleased with good dinners, but didn't understand anything higher. I am not as clever and intellectual as you are, Désirée, but I was not too stupid to understand all that. And I am not saying all these things to reproach you. Only to justify myself. I don't think I was rash. I had patience. I made allowances for you. I made allowances for your foreign bringing up, and for your finding English ways and people strange at first. But first and last it was all the same. The truth is, you did not love me. That was the real cause of all the trouble. It took a long time to convince me of it. I didn't want to be convinced. But you showed me so plainly that I was no companion for you that at last I went out among my friends, and found kind looks and pleasant words. As to affection, I had to do without that. You say you have been 'so sorry for me.' Well, there was cause. But I, too, was

sorry for you. I was not bitter or angry so much as sorry, Désirée. And I would have done anything on earth to make your life brighter. But I could not go on loving you as I had loved you at first. It was not possible. You tell me to speak sincerely, and I will. But I know all the time I am not saying my thoughts and feelings exactly as they are, because I am not good at putting them out in writing. And besides that, my head is confused now. I have been badgered by business matters here, and have been out all day in the sun. And I feel a good deal knocked up. But I must just say this word in answer to your letter. If at the end of the month, when I come back to Schwalbach, you are still in the same mind, thinking that it will be best for us to part, so let it be. I don't wish to keep you chained to my side, to your sorrow and discontent. But as to what you say about my being 'absolutely free to be happy in my own way,' there can be no such freedom and happiness for me as you are meaning. I must bear my own burden. I suppose other folks have as heavy ones. But I could not do such a wrong to any innocent woman—supposing there was any one who would be willing to make the sacrifice for me; and I don't know that there is any one who would do it. I could not do any confiding creature such a wrong as to put her in the vacant place you will leave in my home, and expose her to contempt and cold looks. Although you have so much book learning, Désirée, you don't know the world as well as I do. At all events you don't know the English world so well. One great reason why I was anxious to come abroad on this business that I am looking after, was to get away from the risk of bringing trouble and talk on innocent heads. And, indeed, when you told me that you had made that arrangement with the Gilberts, I was not surprised, and I felt you were right. No, no, Désirée, it is hard enough that you and I should be unhappy without dragging others into our misery. My actions are in my own power, whatever my feelings may be. I feel that I have not said half that I want to say, and yet my letter is twice as long as yours. But my head is getting worse, and I must leave off. Don't write back again to me. It is no use writing. I shall be in Schwalbach by the end of the month."

The letter was begun in George's free, bold handwriting, with great broad

strokes, and lines as straight as the furrow made by a strong, skilful ploughman. But long before the end of it was reached the letters wavered, and grew indistinct. And the lines slanted crookedly here and there. He was ill.

He ill! George Lester, who seemed to bear an atmosphere of health and vigour about with him! But, when he left me, he was looking thin and pale and haggard. He did not seem to have lost his strength. He could walk out and tramp for miles in all weathers. But he was not himself. And now this headache—this confession, on his own part, that he was feeling very much knocked up—!

The last lines of the letter seemed to efface in my mind all that had gone before them. I could think of nothing but those words, "My head is confused, I have been a good deal badgered with business matters, and I feel knocked up." And, again, "My head is getting worse, and I must leave off."

I was still sitting, holding the letter in my hand, with my eyes fixed on the almost illegible characters of the last page, when there came a hurried knocking at the door of my room. "Madame, madame, here is a telegram!" cried a voice outside. With trembling fingers I opened the door, and took from the hands of my maid a telegraphic despatch. It was from Pesth, sent by some one whose name was unknown to me, and contained these words in German, "George Lester very ill at this hotel. Friends are requested to communicate at once with landlord."

In less than two hours I was on my way to Pesth. I travelled without more cessation than was necessitated by the hours of departure of the trains. When I was forced to wait at a station, I walked up and down instead of resting. My maid slept, wrapped in her shawl, on the sofas of waiting-rooms, in the railway carriages, or where she could. I did not sleep until we were within a few hours of our journey's end, when I fell into a deep slumber, from which I was with difficulty roused on arriving at our destination. I had telegraphed to the hotel that I was on my way, and I was expected. The landlord met me as I alighted from the carriage at the inn-door, and, speaking in French, told me that there was no improvement in Mr. Lester's condition, but he was still alive.

Still alive! The words cut me like a knife.

"Does he know that I am coming?" I asked.

"Ah, no madame. He knows nothing. He has brain fever, and is out of his mind altogether. When he is not raving, he is in a sort of stupor. I am very glad you have come, madame. We do what we can; but it is a great responsibility and a great anxiety in a house of this kind."

And then he went on with a string of complaints, and spoke as if he were injured by my husband's having fallen ill in his house. Whilst he was speaking, the doctor came in, a coarse-faced, heavy man, with a morose brow. He did not think it necessary to soften what he had to say to me, because I was the patient's wife, but gave his report of the case in the plainest terms. It all seemed very horrible to me. The men were so unmoved, so unfeeling. Both landlord and doctor seemed chiefly bent on magnifying their own trouble and responsibility. Yet, I could not but acknowledge that they had done what was needful for my husband. A nurse had been provided to watch him.

"Some people would have sent the gentleman to the hospital," said the landlord; "but, as I was assured his malady was not infectious, I let him remain."

"It seems to me," I said, turning on him almost fiercely, "that you have done nothing but what can be paid for in money. By good fortune, I am able to pay. Continue to do all in your power for my husband, and I shall not count the cost. You can make this known to all the servants in your establishment. It may stimulate their humanity."

The man bowed, and shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. He would do all that was possible, he said.

"When may I see him?" I asked of the doctor, who had stood by, watching me in silence.

"Oh, whenever you like," he answered carelessly. "He won't know you. It will make no difference. Only you must keep quiet."

My maid, who had been standing at my elbow, crying in a feeble manner, and not understanding a syllable of what was being said, now perceived that I was about to move away after the doctor, and begged me to take some rest and refreshment before going into the sick room. But I would not pause then. "I will eat afterwards," I said. "And now I do not feel tired." It was true, I did not. All

fatigue seemed to have fallen off me like a garment.

I followed the doctor down a long corridor. Without any preliminary word of caution he opened the door of a room at the end of it, and I saw my husband.

His bed faced the door. He was lying in it with wide open eyes raised to about the level of my face, and when I entered, they seemed to fix themselves on me with a fierce glare. His face was flushed and haggard. His blue eyes glittered, as they looked full into mine. How terrible it was to see that look! How hard to believe that those eager eyes saw, not me, at whom they stared so intently, but some image projected from the weary burning brain!

"George, George!" I said softly. He showed no consciousness of my voice. I spoke again. It was in vain. I went to the bedside and knelt down, and took his burning hand in mine. All in vain! There was a mysterious gulf between us; and neither sight, nor sound, nor touch of mine could reach across it. We were parted more hopelessly than if we had been at opposite ends of the earth. And in that dreadful moment I knew that I loved him with all the passionate strength of my heart.

Oh my husband! Oh my poor love! Oh blind, unhappy woman that I had been! And now I stood beside him, and held his hand, and wetted his forehead with my tears, and all the while he was shut up away from me in a dreadful solitude of suffering!

For three weeks I scarcely left his room. I lay on the floor beside his bed. There were hired nurses to attend on him also, but I would not leave him to their care. He wandered and talked almost incessantly. He was of a constitution so strong and vigorous that the fever seemed to rage like a furious sentient thing against his strength, and battle with him for the mastery. I looked on helpless, quivering with cruel terrors, seeing him wrestle for his life through the awful silence of the night, and the pitiless brightness of the day: forcing myself to be still, and to seem calm, although I could have screamed aloud in the agony of my suspense; helpless always, helpless, helpless! Yet I did not flinch, nor break down, nor even shed tears. I kept saying to myself, "When he recovers consciousness, he must see only serene faces around him."

But when he spoke, in the still hours of the night, and his mutterings grew distinct enough to be intelligible, and he would call upon Amy—always Amy—and ask her to sing that song again that his mother used to sing in the old times—oh that was hard! I have cut the palms of my clenched hands with my nails as I lay in the dim room listening to him.

"Amy! Amy! Take it away. I cannot hear your voice. Take away this burning coal from my forehead. If you take that away I shall hear you sing. I only see you move your lips. Amy! Amy!"

Then he would say, "Poor little thing!" as rapidly as his lips could form the words, in a low, monotonous voice, over and over again, for an hour together. All those weeks, and days, and hours he never knew me; never was conscious of my touch, never uttered my name. The battle went on night and day. The strong man struggled with the fiery serpent that held him in its folds. I sent for a physician of note from Vienna. He came and consulted with the Pesth doctor. He could give no comfort. He could give little help. If the patient's strength would but last out, when the fever left him, he might recover. If not—and the physician shook his head, and looked at me pityingly, and went his way.

At length, one morning, when I raised my head from the mattress on which I slept, to look up at George's bed, I perceived that his eyes were open, and that they were looking at me as if they saw me! My heart gave a great start, and began to beat as if it would suffocate me. But I rose up quietly, and drew near the bed. It was a fair summer's dawn. The eastern sky was rose-coloured, and birds were chirping down in the garden of the inn.

I saw his lips move, and bent down my ear to listen. "Désirée," he whispered. I put my arms round him, and hid my face on the pillow beside him, and cried silently, curbing my sobs, lest they should disturb him. He feebly kissed my cheek, which lay against his mouth, and fell again into a deep, tranquil sleep. And I lay still, so still, until I, too, sank into a profound slumber, of pure exhaustion, but with a strange consciousness of relief and happiness through it all.

The nurse woke me with her hand on my shoulder. I looked up, and saw her face very white and strange in the morn-

ing light. "Hush! He is better!" I said, in a low eager voice. She gently moved my arms from around him, and tried to lead me from the bed.

He was dead.

* * * * *

It is a year ago to-day. One year! I sit and write at my desk, and hold my pen firm and steady. And when I raise my eyes I see that pale plain face in the glass opposite. Quite tearless now, the eyes are. And they look at me like the eyes of my mother's ghost.

How hard they thought me, those people in R—! How cold and stern and unfeeling! I was not displeased that they thought so. It kept them aloof from me. It saved me from their sympathy. Great Heaven! I think there were moments when a word of pity, a soft look, would have driven me mad.

Yes; now I remember so well all the incidents of the day that Dr. Gilbert met me in London. For weeks afterwards I could not have recalled one look or tone of his. I only understood the main fact, that he promised to accept the trust for Amy, and to administer the little fortune I had settled on her. But now, the whole scene—the whole manner of the man—comes back to me. He dwelt much on "Mr. Lester's generous thought of the orphan girl to whom he had ever been so kind and considerate." And he said, "It seems hard—very hard—to Miss Bent that you will not see her, Mrs. Lester. I assure you the poor child has felt this dreadful blow—this sad loss—very deeply." (She had "felt it very deeply!") "But of course I cannot presume to insist further, after your very peremptory refusal."

"I cannot see Amy," was all I answered. I said it in a dry, steady voice that seemed to have only one note in it.

He went away with the coldest farewell to me. Only at the last moment he turned, before leaving the room, and said, "I shall bear testimony to the scrupulous exactitude with which you have carried out your late husband's wishes, Mrs. Lester. I wish to do you justice. There being no will, you were, of course, not legally bound to hand over to Miss Bent the bequest which your husband had mentioned his intention of making. Miss

Bent shall be made to understand this; and she will be duly grateful."

With that speech he went away. I had told him a lie about the bequest to Amy. But I wished her to be provided for, and that was the easiest way. Yes; as I think of it now, I see that he almost hated me, despite my "scrupulous exactitude." It mattered less than nothing what he thought of me.

To-day came an envelope directed to me with a silver love-knot to fasten it. Amy Bent is married, and Mrs. Gilbert—the gentle, foolish little thing—sends me wedding cards! She writes, too, a line inside the envelope to say that Amy is very happy, and that she (Mrs. Gilbert) is "sure Amy would be so glad to hear from me." It is well that she is happily married. He would have wished that. But her happiness has no need of me to complete it. I shall never see her more. I am alone in the world with my sorrow.

My father's words of long ago have often recurred to me lately. "Désirée, I wish you had some occupation which brought you into direct contact with suffering and sorrow. If you could be an hospital nurse for six months, I believe you would be a happier woman for ever after." Ah, the prescription was a false one: or it was applied too late. Heaven knows that I see sorrow and suffering enough. My money and my time are at the service of the sick poor. I have no other use for them. But none the less do I bear about with me the burthen of an inconsolable grief.

My father would have had me return to live with him. But I cannot do that. I cannot leave England which holds that grave in the village churchyard. He was carried back all the weary miles across land and sea; and I laid him beside his mother in the West country village.

I too shall lie there some day. May it be soon!

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